

Accelerating Results for Black Males: A Resource Guide for Promise Neighborhoods

PART II. Ensuring Black Males Are Successful Early Readers

This document is Part II of a series of papers developed to help communities promote black male achievement in their neighborhoods. Part II provides best practices, tools, and resources to support black boys, from birth through third grade, to become successful early readers. In total, this series comprises a guide that is geared toward using the Promise Neighborhoods model to coordinate educational, health, and community supports to help children succeed from the cradle to college to career. This guide was produced by the [Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink](#) with assistance from the [Institute for Black Male Achievement](#) and funding from the [Open Society Foundations Campaign for Black Male Achievement](#). This guide is applicable to any community working to improve outcomes for black males. It can also be adapted for communities working to improve outcomes for other populations.

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Introduction

Nothing is more important to the success of a diverse nation than ensuring all Americans live in safe, healthy, and engaging environments that set them up to manifest their full potential throughout their lives.

- All-In Nation: An America that Works for All

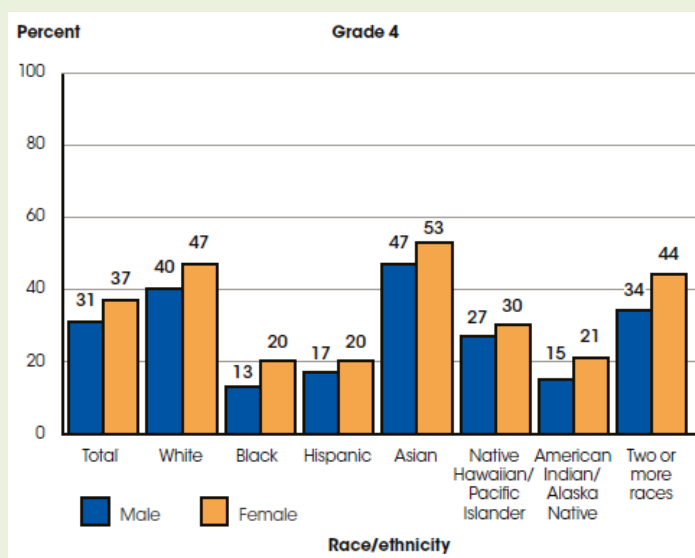
A strong and vibrant America requires children who are educated, healthy, and ready to enter the workforce. In a nation in which over 16 million children live in poverty, this is a tall order. The interconnected challenges of poverty—lack of access to quality education, workforce training, health services, safe streets, or stable housing—disproportionately impact communities of color. These groups are often hit first and worst by economic downturns, and barred from ladders to opportunity.

In order for our nation to succeed, all people need a fair shot at success. This means that the country faces not just a moral obligation to make every neighborhood a community of opportunity; there is an economic imperative as well. By 2043, our nation will be majority people of color. To take full advantage of the potential of this demographic shift, we must prepare children of color today to reach their full potential. This starts with preparing every child to be a successful early reader. Third-grade reading proficiency is a critical milestone on the path to high school graduation and career success.¹ Yet, only 13 percent of black fourth grade boys were proficient readers in 2011, compared with 40 percent of white boys and 20 percent of black girls.² More than any other group, black boys lack the opportunity and resources to support early reading success.

A combination of family, community, health, and educational factors in early childhood conspire to undermine black boys' early reading success. Early childhood is a period of rapid growth in all areas of a child's development. During this time, the brain develops trillions of neurons and connections which form a foundation for all of the learning, health, and behavior that follow. As noted in *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, quality interactions with parents, teachers, and care providers; good health and nutrition; and supportive learning environments enrich the brain, promote healthy development, and expose children to a wealth of words and experiences that form the basis for their early reading success.³ As several national studies have shown, black children—and black boys in particular—are less likely to have access to these developmental supports.

Black boys face disproportionate challenges from the start. In 2009, black children were twice as likely to be born of low-birth weight, and black males, in particular, had the highest infant mortality rate of any race or gender group.⁴ These health

U.S. Fourth Grade Students Scoring at or above Proficient on 2011 NAEP Reading Assessments



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2011 Reading Assessment, NAEP Data Explorer.

inequities are compounded by lack of access to quality medical care. Only 44 percent of black children had a medical home in 2007 compared to 67 percent of white children.⁵

As a child's first teacher, parents play the most important role in determining children's early reading success.⁶ Black boys have been found to be less likely than any other race or gender group to be talked to, played with, or read to by their parents.⁷ And while research suggests that fathers make a unique contribution to child development, two out of every three (64 percent) black children lived apart from their fathers in 2011 compared to only 25 percent of white children.⁸

The neighborhoods children grow up in also shape their development and black children are more likely to grow up in poverty and to live in resource-poor neighborhoods.⁹ In a landmark 2009 study, as many as 78 percent of black children and only 5 percent of white children born between 1985 and 2000 were determined to have grown up in high-disadvantage neighborhoods characterized by poverty, unemployment, welfare, families headed by a single mother, racial segregation, and population density.¹⁰

And while black boys struggle to access developmental supports in the community, the early care and education they do receive often fail to prepare them for lasting educational success. In 2006, black children were twice as likely as white children to attend a low-quality early learning center, three times as likely to attend low-quality, home-based care, and more than six times as likely to attend a high-poverty elementary school.¹¹ Within these environments, black boys tend to fare worst. Data from the National Prekindergarten Study show that, from 2003 to 2004, black pre-K students were twice as likely to be expelled as their peers. Black boys accounted for 91.4 percent of these expulsions.¹²

These challenges are complex and far-reaching. They cannot be eradicated quickly or easily. We need a framework of equitable policies, investments, incentives, and strategies to create systems that ensure all black boys are healthy, their families are strong, their preschools and elementary schools are effective, and their communities support success.

Promise Neighborhoods—communities of opportunity that coordinate high-quality educational, health, and community supports around children and families—are ideal vehicles for promoting the success of black boys, their families, their communities, and their regions. A federal effort launched in 2010, the Promise Neighborhoods program has brought government, nonprofits, schools, and community members together to build comprehensive cradle-to-college-to-career pipelines of support that have enabled black boys in the nation's most distressed communities to become successful early readers—and then continue on a path to educational and career success. By investing in black boys—a vulnerable group—America is investing in a better future for all children and families, and helping to create an equitable nation in which everyone can participate and prosper.

This document features the multifaceted solutions Promise Neighborhoods are using to promote black boys' early reading success, and offers resources and strategies to accelerate their impact on this population. While it is intended primarily to support Promise Neighborhoods, this guide is applicable to other efforts focused on improving outcomes for children and families in distressed communities.

Results and Indicators for Promise Neighborhoods

Decades of research establish a range of family, school, and community factors that influence children’s healthy development, academic success, and college graduation.¹³ Informed by this research, the Promise Neighborhoods results framework focuses on the results that most contribute to these goals along with specific indicators best positioned to track progress against those results.¹⁴ As such, this framework includes important areas of focus for any effort that aims to improve outcomes across the developmental trajectory for low-income children and children of color. The action steps and resources in this document will help communities connect black boys, ages 0-8, to the family, school, and community supports they need to develop into successful early readers. In doing so, this document will help communities achieve the results and indicators highlighted in green below.

Result	Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) Indicator
Black male children enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school.	1. Number and percent of black male children, from birth to kindergarten entry, who have a place where they usually go, other than an emergency room, when they are sick or in need of advice about their health.
	2. Number and percent of black male three-year-olds and black male children in kindergarten who, at the beginning of the program or school year, demonstrate age-appropriate functioning across multiple domains of early learning as determined using developmentally appropriate early learning measures.
	3. Number and percent of black male children, from birth to kindergarten entry, participating in center-based or formal home-based early learning settings or programs, which may include Early Head Start, Head Start, child care, or publicly funded preschool.
Black male students are proficient in core subjects.	4. Number and percent of black male students at or above grade level according to state mathematics and reading or language arts assessments in at least the grades required by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (third through eighth and once in high school).
Black male students successfully transition from middle grades to high school.	5. Attendance rate of black male students in sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth grade as defined by average daily attendance.
Black male students graduate from high school.	6. Graduation rate of black male students.
Black male high school graduates obtain a postsecondary degree, certification, or credential.	7. Number and percent of black male Promise Neighborhoods students who a) enroll in a two-year or four-year college or university after graduation; b) matriculate to an institution of higher education and place into college-level mathematics and English without need for remediation; c) graduate from a two-year or four-year college or university or vocational certification completion; and d) earn industry-recognized certificates or credentials.
Black males are healthy.	8. Number and percent of black male children who participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily.
	9. Number and percent of black male children who consume five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily
Black male students feel safe at school and in their community.	10. Number and percent of black male students who feel safe at school and traveling to and from school, as measured by a school climate needs assessment.
Black male students live in stable communities.	11. Black male student mobility rate.
Families and community members support learning of black male students in Promise Neighborhoods schools.	12. For black male children birth to kindergarten entry, the number and percent of parents or family members who report that they read to their children three or more times a week.
	13. For black male children in kindergarten through eighth grade, the number and percent of parents or family members who report encouraging their children to read books outside of school.
	14. For black male children in the ninth to 12th grades, the number and percent of parents or family members who report talking with their child about the importance of college and career.
Black male students have access to 21 st century learning tools.	15. Number and percent of black male students who have school and home access (and percent of the day they have access) to broadband Internet and a connected computing device.

Step 1: Ensure a Healthy Start



A boy from the Indianola Promise Community receives a routine check-up. Photo courtesy of the Delta Health Alliance.

In rural Indianola, located in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, children and families face severe health challenges. Here, infant mortality rates are higher than anywhere else in the nation—and they are particularly high for poor black children. Under the umbrella of Delta Health Alliance Indianola Promise Community, the Indianola Promise Community Early Education Collaborative brings together community resources to create a pipeline of coordinated health-care and educational supports that ensure children ages 0-8 are healthy and prepared to read proficiently by third grade.

Physicians, educators, social workers, and children’s advocates all work together to identify, recruit, and refer families to the resources they need to promote children’s healthy development. Parent outreach begins before the child is born. Women recruited from the local community and trained as health outreach workers encourage expectant mothers to seek medical care, keep appointments during pregnancy as well as plan follow-up visits for infants and children. Likewise, the medical community welcomes and supports the service of home visiting outreach as an added structure for building health and promoting optimal development of children. This scaffolding approach serves as an effective mechanism for ensuring the health and well-being of the most vulnerable children in the community. Since 2009, the Delta Health Alliance has provided more than 4,750 home visits to over 400 families, reducing low birth weight and preterm births, decreasing the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and increasing breastfeeding, well child visits, and immunizations for participating African American mothers. Building on this success, the Delta Health Alliance is expanding services targeting young children and families in the Indianola Promise Community to ensure that every child—particularly the most vulnerable—has a healthy start.

Promise Neighborhoods are providing black boys with a healthy foundation for learning by coordinating health, family, and educational supports to reach new and expecting mothers, connect them to a medical home, and provide them with the information and resources they need to keep their children healthy. This collaboration not only supports health, it also supports learning. For example, in many Promise Neighborhoods, health providers work closely with early care and education providers to reinforce messages about the importance of early reading during pediatric visits. By leveraging the collective strength of these diverse stakeholders, Promise Neighborhoods are ensuring that every child—particularly black boys and other vulnerable populations—receive the support they need to develop into healthy, successful early readers.

Step 2: Empower Families to Support Early Learning



A mother participating in the NAZ Family Academy reads to her son. Photo by Jillian Kahn.

In the Northside Achievement Zone, a low-income African American community in North Minneapolis, only 29 percent of children enter kindergarten ready to learn. The Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) and its Family Academy program are changing that trajectory by empowering parents with the skills and resources to prepare their children to succeed in school. When Sonya joined the [Family Academy Infant and Toddler course](#), she didn't interact much with her two-and-a-half-year-old son, Tyrone. She passed on participating in class circle time with the other parents and children, and spent breaks on her cell phone. Over the next 12 weeks, Sonya learned concrete strategies to promote her son's language and literacy development and to develop a positive, responsive relationship with him. By the end of the course, Sonya enthusiastically participated in circle time and spent breaks playing interactive games with her son. She also began explaining to Tyrone what was happening during transitions. This new relationship has had a dramatic impact on her son. Once a withdrawn child, he's now much more responsive to his mother and teachers.

"Family Academy is giving parents the tools and information about child development to enhance their parenting skills and to help prepare their children for school," explained Andre Dukes, director of the program. Dukes and other trained community members work with researchers at the University of Minnesota to develop a curriculum that combines input from NAZ families with research-based strategies to address the needs of the families they serve. Driven by this process, the Family Academy team has taken a direct approach to engaging fathers. Of the 92 parents who graduated from the program in 2011 and 2012, 20 have been fathers. As Dukes explained, "fathers in the program learn how to support healthy development through simply playing with their children, as well as the critical role they play in modeling appropriate behavior through interactions with the mother of their children." This has benefited the entire family as fathers in the program have decided to go back to school, secure employment, and three fathers have married the mothers of their children.

After graduating from Family Academy, these parents continue to receive support. Parents work one on one with their NAZ connector, a full-time "family coach," to develop action steps that achieve goals for each child in the family using an [Education Goals Checklist](#). Parents take action steps such as attending a parent-teacher conference, signing up for after-school programming, and developing a homework routine. By working with partner organizations, NAZ connectors ensure families have the resources they need to achieve their goals and continue to support families as their children progress through school.

Along with the Northside Achievement Zone, other Promise Neighborhoods are helping parents support their black boys' early learning by providing them with interactive, family-focused learning opportunities at home, in parenting classes, and in early care and education programs. Ongoing case management complements these programs to help families develop strategies to support their children's educational success.¹⁵

Step 3: Promote Black Male Involvement



Gordon reads to students at Nap Ford Community School. Photo courtesy of Nap Ford Community School.

Children benefit from the unique contribution fathers and other men in their lives make to their healthy development.¹⁶ For black boys, who are less likely to have access to a father at home, positive male involvement can make a huge difference. When Principal Jennie Porter-Smith hired Phillip Gordon as a kindergarten teaching assistant at Nap Ford Community School, she didn't realize what a difference he would make. Raised in the Parramore neighborhood of Orlando, Florida, where three in four children live in poverty, Gordon was determined to give back to his community. With the help of the Parramore Kidz Zone, a model inspired by the Harlem Children's Zone®, he was offered an opportunity to realize this goal by working at Nap Ford.

Before Gordon joined the team, black boys at the school were frequently cited for disciplinary referrals and general discipline issues. Phillip changed that dynamic. "Just his presence in the classroom engaged and motivated the boys more," Porter-Smith explained, "There were fewer redirections and fewer disciplinary problems."

Watching the positive impact Gordon had on black boys in the classroom caused Porter-Smith to reflect on how her school could do a better job at including black men in students' lives. "We really needed to do something strategic to make sure we are engaging black men in the school community," she explained. Porter-Smith hired Frederick Reeves, an early childhood educator, to implement a schoolwide Black Male Initiative. Reeves, who is a black male, provides instructional support, individualized tutoring, and guidance counseling for the students. His first priority, however, is father engagement. Every month, Reeves recruits fathers and other male caregivers to participate in a workshop where they discuss the challenges they are having and learn how to cultivate the language and literacy development of their children. They also participate in a range of father-focused activities including a Dad's Breakfast and regular football get-togethers where they connect with one another and swap fatherhood advice. For Porter-Smith, these efforts are an essential part of a school leader's responsibilities. "Our charter school is disproportionately male," she noted. "We have a responsibility to meet the needs of the students we have."

Promise Neighborhoods are coming up with solutions to ensure that black men are present and engaged in supporting the healthy development of black boys at every stage of their childhood. This starts with distributing fatherhood tip sheets, recruiting fathers into father-focused parenting classes, and providing individualized coaching to help them respond to their newborn children's needs, form a lasting bond with their children, and strengthen their partnerships with the mothers to support their children's success.¹⁷ These initial strategies are followed by targeted outreach and activities designed to involve fathers in early learning programs and schools. Promise Neighborhoods are hiring black males—teachers, childcare workers, tutors, and mentors—to work in these settings, contributing to the positive development and engagement of black boys and their fathers.¹⁸

Step 4: Expand Access and Reduce Barriers to Early Learning Opportunities

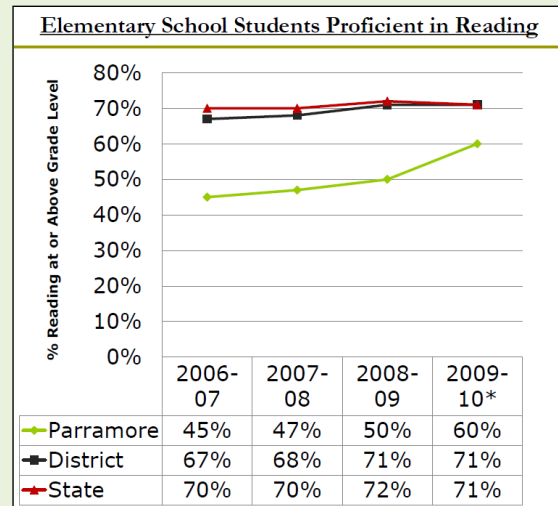


PKZ boy drawing about "finding his way." Photo by Victoria Shade.
linger on a massive waitlist as their children were left behind.

High-quality early learning opportunities are critical to preparing black boys for school and reducing disparities in educational achievement. In Orlando's Parramore neighborhood, however, only 39 percent of children under five years old attended early learning programs in 2006; nearly all of them were black. Formidable barriers kept families from accessing these opportunities. High-quality programs were too costly for most. Families eligible for subsidies struggled to obtain the documents they needed to qualify. Even those that did qualify for a subsidy were forced to

Launched in 2006, the Parramore Kidz Zone (PKZ) took action to expand access to high-quality early care and education opportunities. It offered the local community child care council a matching grant to create a special subsidy pool that got Parramore children off the waitlist and into early learning programs. Then, PKZ opened a space in the local community center where families could go to obtain the documents they would need to qualify for subsidies. For families that were ineligible for federal or state subsidies, PKZ covered the full cost of attendance.

With these subsidies in hand, PKZ enrollment specialists gave each family with young children a list of rated high-quality early care and education programs in the area. When families enroll their children in one of these programs, they get a subsidy to pay for it. Taken together, these strategies increased the total number of Parramore children enrolled in early learning programs by 30 percent over five years. As more of these children enter elementary school, the reading proficiency gap continues to close.



Source: Local Health Council of East Central Florida, PKZ 2010-11 Annual Evaluation Report.

When communities work to connect children and families with the highest needs to quality early learning opportunities, they create the foundation for lasting, equitable results. Like Parramore, Promise Neighborhoods are developing innovative solutions to eliminate barriers that prevent black boys from accessing these opportunities. They are training, certifying, and providing ongoing business instruction to residents who want to open childcare centers; utilizing community and school spaces to open new classrooms and early learning centers; working with local and state policymakers to increase investment in early education; and offering summer pre-K programs to close the school readiness gap for children without prior preschool experience.¹⁹

Step 5: Improve Quality and Promote Equity in Early Learning Programs



Cynthia Russell reads to her students. Photo by [Cyn's Heavenly Angels](#)

In a community in which fewer than six in 10 children enter kindergarten with age-appropriate skills, the Buffalo Promise Neighborhood is developing a system of supports to help early learning providers change that trajectory. As a major partner in this effort, Read to Succeed Buffalo (RTSB) works with family childcare providers, early learning centers, and elementary schools in the Buffalo Promise Neighborhood to increase their capacity to provide a high-quality, equitable early learning experience for their students. This starts with administering developmental assessments to children in childcare settings, preschools, and elementary schools to monitor each child's progress, respond to those who need additional support, and provide the Promise

Neighborhood with common benchmarks for measuring the performance of each early learning partner—and the collaborative as a whole. RTSB literacy specialists regularly monitor the quality of these learning environments and provide coaching for childcare providers and teachers to help them integrate a literacy focus in the daily routine and target instruction to their students' particular learning needs.

For Cynthia Russell, owner of Cyn's Heavenly Angels Family Childcare, RTSB coaching has strengthened the capacity to promote her students' emergent literacy skills. Prior to coaching from RTSB, Russell and her colleagues did not incorporate reading exercises into their daily routine. "We read to them, but it wasn't with purpose," she explained. After several years of coaching, "we now do the ABC's every morning and I'm proud to say that every child does letter identification and sound identification." Russell also rearranged the environment to meet the needs of children with diverse learning styles. "We now have a listening center; a dramatic play area; a cozy corner; a fine motor skills area; and a gross motor skills area. Books are now always accessible in every area."

RTSB is closing the gap for black boys and helping to prepare them for early reading success. Over the past two years, three-year-old black boys attending RTSB-supported Head Start programs have been able to catch up to their female counterparts and demonstrate age-appropriate reading skills by the time they enter kindergarten. Moving forward, RTSB will follow these children as they progress through school, working with parents, teachers, and community partners to keep them on-track to read proficiently by third grade.

As the Buffalo Promise Neighborhood partnership demonstrates, Promise Neighborhoods are collaborating with a multitude of early learning partners to coordinate and improve the quality of early childhood education for all children. These efforts are helping early learning providers promote equitable outcomes for black boys by increasing their capacity to understand black boys' learning needs, introducing them to effective instructional strategies, and by helping them use data to identify and close race and gender gaps in language and literacy development.

Step 6: Provide High-Quality After-school and Summer Learning Opportunities



Photo courtesy of Plymouth Christian Youth Center.

Without access to the enriching activities available to more affluent peers, children from low-income families lose as much as three months of reading comprehension skills over the summer.²⁰ For black boys, who often face disproportionate academic challenges, summer learning loss can be especially detrimental to their educational success. In North Minneapolis, the Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) is partnering with the Plymouth Christian Youth Center, Ascension, Patchwork Quilt, and Beacons for Summer to provide enriching summer programs to children in the community.

Each morning at the Plymouth Christian Youth Center, children sharpen their reading and math skills by playing the engaging, evidence-based

computer games Lexia and First in Math. During the afternoon, they take part in a range of enriching activities including creating posters, attending field trips, cooking, and making music. While these programs emphasize active, engaging learning activities, they are all based on a common set of evidence-based practices, called a NAZ Solution Plan. Taken together, these programs are turning a curve on reading proficiency for black boys. Among the 170 NAZ students in grades K through five who completed the summer programs in 2013, 55 were black boys. Of these boys, none experienced summer learning loss. In fact, 65 percent *gained* half a grade level or more in reading and 44 percent gained a full grade level or more, a success rate comparable to other children in the program. NAZ plans to build on this success by offering these programs as after-school enrichment during the school year. As NAZ Chief Operating Officer Michelle Martin explained, “Our next milestone is to see how many of those scholars, who seem to be doing better academically through their summer programming, do when they take their assessments [during the school year].”

Beyond North Minneapolis, Promise Neighborhoods are providing black boys a range of out-of-school time opportunities that enrich the school day, prevent summer learning loss, and foster a lasting love of learning. Many sites are implementing national models such as the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools®, while others are using local models that have demonstrated a strong record of success. These programs are coordinated across the community and supported by common standards and evidence-based practices and a shared commitment to results that ensures all children, particularly black boys, are successful.

Conclusion

The steps proposed in this guide are designed to strengthen the capacity of Promise Neighborhoods programs and strategies to provide black boys a strong foundation for educational success. These action steps are designed to help Promise Neighborhoods deliberately and systematically remove the barriers to opportunity facing young black boys to enable them to access the family, community, and educational supports that all children need to thrive. Successful implementation of these strategies will undoubtedly depend on strong partnerships, continuous data use, a shared commitment to equity, and the capacity to align stakeholders behind common standards of excellence. When followed by robust supports in later stages of the cradle-to-college-to-career continuum, these strategies will undoubtedly make a lasting difference in the lives of black boys in the community.

Ultimately, however, the challenges facing black boys and their families have their roots in failed public policies that affect early childhood education, schools, employment, health, and incarceration in the places where they live, learn, and play. These failed policies extend beyond the target neighborhoods to impact entire regions and the nation as a whole. Promise Neighborhoods can scale and sustain the gains their programs achieve by leveraging the collective strength of local, state, and national policymakers, advocacy organizations, foundations, and nonprofit partners to advance policies that increase investment in Promise Neighborhoods, promote universal pre-K, expand access to full-day kindergarten, increase funding for underresourced schools, and strengthen families and communities. In doing so, Promise Neighborhoods will not only enable black boys to be successful, but also ensure that all children—even those with the highest need—are able to realize their potential and build a brighter, more equitable future for the nation.

Resources

The following resources and strategies are intended to support the efforts of Promise Neighborhoods to promote the early reading success of black boys.

General Resources

- ✓ [The Educational Testing Service \(ETS\)](#) is deeply committed to closing the achievement gap through rigorous research that supports action, practical tools for real-life solutions, and the sharing of ideas, strategies, and resources. [ETS has developed a series of research briefs, videos, and resources](#) based on the input of leading researchers and practitioners, exploring the challenges facing young black boys and the opportunities to position them for educational success.
- ✓ [The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#), a Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink partner, is a collaborative effort by foundations, nonprofit partners, states, and communities to move the needle on third-grade reading proficiency. They have produced a range of [resources](#) related to promoting the early reading success of low-income children, with a particular emphasis on early childhood education, health, and school attendance.
- ✓ The [Alliance for Early Success](#) is a collaboration of state, national, and funding partners to advance state policies that lead to improved health, learning, and economic outcomes for young children, starting at birth and continuing through age eight. Their [Birth Through Age Eight State Policy Framework](#) and [research compilation](#) are excellent tools to help communities advocate for policies that improve health, learning, and economic outcomes for vulnerable young children.

Health

- ✓ [Reach Out and Read](#) is a national nonprofit that trains and supports medical providers who give books to children and advice to parents about the importance of reading aloud at well child exams. This highly effective program focuses on low-income children (ages 0-5).
- ✓ [The National Center for Medical Home Implementation \(NCMHI\)](#) works with federal agencies and other partners and stakeholders to ensure that all children and youth have access to a medical home. Among other things, they have a [toolkit for building a medical home](#) and an [extensive listing of best practices and resources for incorporating cultural competency into medical homes](#).

Parent Engagement

Strategies for adapting parenting programs to support the healthy development of black boys²¹

Evidence-based parenting programs include [Parents as Teachers](#); [Triple P – Positive Parenting Program](#); [Nurse-Family Partnership](#); [Black Parenting Program](#); [Incredible Years](#); and [Nurturing Skills for Teen Parents](#). A parent education program focused on equity for black boys might include:

- ✓ *A curriculum and staff who are reflective of the community, including its interests, needs, and assets.*
- ✓ *A strong emphasis that black boys need the same level of love and responsiveness as girls; to be read to, talked to as much as girls, and to be allowed to engage in rough and tumble play.*
- ✓ *The role of the father and strategies to promote effective co-parenting.*
- ✓ *How to overcome racism and racialized barriers that parents may face that impact family success.*
- ✓ *How to help black boys deal with marginalizing or hurtful racial interactions that they may experience with peers and how to promote cultural affirmation.*
- ✓ *How to promote academic achievement despite race and gender barriers in schools.*

- ✓ The creators of the award-winning documentary, *American Promise*, have created a range of resources, tips, and opportunities to help parents and educators promote the success of black boys.
- ✓ Reading Rockets is a national multimedia literacy initiative offering information and resources on how young kids learn to read, why so many struggle, and how caring adults can help. They offer a series of one-page tip sheets to help parents support the early literacy of their children.
- ✓ AttendanceWorks is a national and state initiative that promotes awareness of the important role that school attendance plays in achieving academic success starting with school entry. They have developed a range of resources, including a Parent Engagement Toolkit for working with parents to improve their children’s attendance in the early grades.
- ✓ There are a range of free mobile apps that promote early reading including the Kids ABC series; iStoryBooks; Pre-K Skills; Read Me Stories: Kids Books; and Booksy. These are compatible with iPhone, Android and Blackberry phones.

Father Involvement

Strategies for hosting father education classes and peer learning groups for black fathers²²

- ✓ Select an appropriate father-focused curriculum such as the Conscious Fathering Program™ (expectant and new fathers), 24/7 Dad (new and experienced fathers), Young Dads, Young Moms (teenage fathers), and InsideOut Dad (incarcerated fathers).
 - ✓ Be responsive to fathers’ interests by selecting a group facilitator who is well-respected, giving the program a name proposed by group members, ensuring that posters and flyers feature black fathers, engaging and recruiting fathers at local sports games and community cook-outs and offering incentives based on fathers’ interests (gift cards for gas, oil changes, etc.).
 - ✓ Build trust and respect by setting aside time in each session for fathers to express a feeling or issue that they are dealing with in their lives, then follow-up with information and resources at the end of the session to help them address these issues.
 - ✓ Break down gender stereotypes by emphasizing that both parents are equally equipped to nurture children and highlight the importance of fathers to their children’s success.
 - ✓ Engage fathers who are reluctant to read to their children by emphasizing that they can promote literacy through story-telling and verbal and physical interaction.
 - ✓ Help fathers improve their own literacy skills to give them the confidence to read to their children.
- ✓ The Dad’s Playbook, developed by the U.S. Department of Education Literacy Information and Communication System, offers easy-to-read tips for fathers to support their children’s early literacy.
 - ✓ Parents as Teachers has produced a toolkit for promoting father-involvement in parenting programs.
 - ✓ The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), as part of its Strengthening Families work, has produced a report featuring best practices for including men in early care and education settings.
 - ✓ The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse is an Office of Family Assistance-funded national resource for fathers, practitioners, programs/federal grantees, states, and the public at-large who are serving or interested in supporting strong fathers and families. They have a range of brief practice- and evidence-based resources to help fatherhood programs operate more effectively.

Early Care and Education

Characteristics of High-Quality Early Childhood Programs²³

Model high-quality early childhood programs with demonstrated effectiveness with black boys include the Abecedarian Project and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers. These programs tend to have:

- ✓ Small class size and low teacher-child ratios (for preschool, 17 children and two teachers; for kindergarten through third-grade classrooms, 25 children and two teachers).
 - ✓ Age-appropriate curricula.
 - ✓ Well-trained teachers with child-development knowledge including the development of black boys.
 - ✓ Parent involvement and/or education components.
 - ✓ A combination of education, health, and nutritional supports to address the needs of children and families in poverty (full-day schedule, connections to quality health-care providers, socio-emotional and mental health supports, free nutritious breakfast and lunch provided, etc.).
-
- ✓ The Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink, in partnership with Harvard's Center on the Developing Child and the Buffalo Promise Neighborhood, has produced a webinar on integrating the latest neurological research into the Promise Neighborhoods program's early childhood strategies.
 - ✓ Ready 4K, a community organizing and advocacy organization for early childhood care and education in Minnesota, has produced a report on incorporating the practices of culturally diverse families into Family, Friend and Neighbor Care.
 - ✓ Head Start offers a range of resources to support the healthy development of children in Head Start and Early Head Start programs and in other preschool settings. This includes a guide and evaluation tool for promoting father involvement in preschool programs.
 - ✓ The Ounce of Prevention Fund works to ensure that all children, particularly those in poverty, have quality early childhood experiences from 0-5. Their Blending and Braiding Early Childhood Program Funding Streams report offers strategies for enhancing financing for early learning programs.
 - ✓ PAS (Promoting Academic Success) is an initiative of the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina of Chapel Hill funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to implement and evaluate ways to improve the academic achievement of boys of color ages 3-8. Developed and used by teachers, school administrators, faculty, and other community partners participating in the five-year project, the PAS resource manual includes three guidebooks to help a school or school district implement its own professional development, extended school or intergenerational mentoring programs to support the success of boys of color in pre-K through third grade. Additional resources from PAS, including a recommended reading list for young boys of color, are listed on their resources page.
 - ✓ Success for All is a national first- through fourth-grade school reform model that combines research-based schoolwide support and intervention tools, powerful instruction, leadership for continuous improvement and professional development to help each student develop into a successful early reader. Operating in thousands of schools across the country, Success for All has been proven effective in federally funded gold-standard research and has been shown to produce equitable outcomes for students of color and for black males in particular.²⁴

Instructional strategies to promote the success of black boys in pre-K through third grade²⁵

- ✓ Make reading interesting by providing texts that cover diverse topics; ensuring that half of all texts are informational or non-fiction; reading and talking about the gross, scary, and humorous things that many boys find interesting and using competition and learning games to increase motivation.
- ✓ Incorporate African American culture and discourse patterns in instruction; use dance and rhythm to teach words and math; adopt classroom décor reflecting African American culture and interests.
- ✓ Accommodate diverse learning styles by incorporating movement and action in instruction; creating hands-on learning activities; permitting students to move or stand while they work; allowing students to hear a story and write about it; and enabling talkative students to be discussion leaders.
- ✓ Focus on teaching self-control and emotional awareness to manage bad behavior; teach boys to recognize and label feelings; explicitly teach rules and strategies for conflict resolution and play games such as Simon Says or Red-Light to teach self-regulation.
- ✓ Don't eliminate recess as a punishment and don't suspend or expel children.
- ✓ Use affirmations to promote positive identity development: Ask students to pick one value that is important to them and write a paragraph describing why they cherish that value.
- ✓ Cultivate a sense of community and allow students to express themselves with daily "Morning Circles" where students share with each other issues, people, and concerns related to their lives.
- ✓ Develop emotionally close and caring relationships with black boys; read to them and spend individual time with them during a break or recess; develop positive relationships with black boys' parents before there are any problems to report.

After-school and Summer Learning

- ✓ The Children's Defense Fund is a nonprofit child advocacy organization that promotes policies and programs that lift children out of poverty; protect them from abuse and neglect; and ensure their access to health care, quality education, and a moral and spiritual foundation. The organization's Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools[®] is a national model summer reading program that provides culturally specific programming designed to help young black children fall in love with reading, increase their self-esteem, learn about their history and culture, and become civically engaged. The program has served over 100,000 children and has produced significant improvements on standardized reading assessments.²⁶ [Click here to start a CDF Freedom School](#)[®] in your community.
- ✓ The After-School Corporation (TASC), a Promise Neighborhoods Institute partner, operates ExpandED Schools, a national demonstration to expand learning opportunities for disadvantaged students in 11 schools around the country (three in Baltimore, three in New Orleans, and five in New York). TASC has created a number of useful tools and resources that support expanded learning time.
- ✓ The Race Matters Institute helps organizations develop policies, programs, practices, and protocols that achieve more equitable outcomes for all children, families, and communities. They have developed a research brief featuring best practices in summer reading programs for black boys.

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